

2/10/09

# LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

## ADVISORY BOARD OF THE WORKERS' COMPENSATION COMMITTEE

Good Afternoon Senator Looney, Representative Janowski and Members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. My name is Benedict Cozzi and I am a third generation Operating Engineer and Connecticut native. I reside in Northford Connecticut with my wife Elizabeth.

Allow me to begin by stating how honored I am to have been nominated by Governor Rell to serve as a Member on the Advisory Board of the Worker's Compensation Committee and what a pleasure it is to be able to testify before this Committee about my professional and personal experiences.

As a small child I watched my father go to work each day as an Operating Engineer. I saw the pride he took in his work as well as the pride he felt being a members of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 478.

My family did not expect me to follow in my father and grandfathers' footsteps, especially when I was accepted into Boston University in 1963; but during the summer after my freshman year, I returned home to Hamden and went to work as an Operating Engineer for the first time. I knew that summer that I had found my calling and from 1964 until 1983, I worked as a heavy equipment operator and was a member of the Local 478.

Those 19 years of running heavy equipment and cranes included some of the best economic times for Connecticut's construction industry and, sadly, some of the worst. I witnessed firsthand amazing feats of modern construction and helped build many of the skylines of Connecticut's bigger cities. I also witnessed firsthand the tragic loss of human life in a number of construction accidents.

From 1983 through 1985, I was the Referral Manager for Local 478, where I was responsible for referring members out to worksites throughout the State. In 1985, I became the Business Representative overseeing New Haven and Middlesex Counties and in 1990 was given the responsibility for New London County. In 2001 I was elected Business Manager and President of the Local.

I also currently serve as President of the Building Trades Council of New Haven as well as President of the Connecticut State Building and Construction Trades Council where I represent over 32,000 men and women who work in Connecticut's Construction Industry. This experience, along with several years spent sitting on Labor-Management Boards and Community Committees, has enabled me to

recognize the importance of creating a strong working relationship with people with whom I share common goals.

For the past seven and half years I have also had the honor of serving on the Advisory Board of the Worker's Compensation Commission where I made the commitment to protect the highest standards of safety and health for Connecticut's workers. This commitment is built on the belief that people are the most important factor in business and industry.

Many people assume that as a labor leader, I must have tunnel vision when it comes to worker's compensation; however I assure you that that opinion is far from the truth since, in addition to being a Trustee for my Local's health fund, I am also an employer with over 45 of my own employees. As a result of those responsibilities, I share the challenges faced daily by businesses when it comes to the high cost of employing people in the State of Connecticut.

As an employer, I know what it's like to pay worker's compensation premiums. I know what it's like to have to scramble to fill a position when a key employee is out with an injury. I know the outrageous cost of remodeling offices and buying new furniture to ensure that they are ergonomically correct.

But, I also know what it's like to watch a man who has given forty years of his life to building the infrastructure of our State, trying to get help through the Worker's Compensation System after being crushed beneath several hundred tons of steel. I know what it's like to watch this so-called support system fail him in his greatest time of need.

I can pledge many things to this Committee today and I can send you letters of recommendation that will tell you what an asset I would be to the Advisory Board. But I'm sure we all know that there must be more. And this is it.

The one thing that I can do, and that I will continue to do if I am re-appointed to the serve as a Member on the Advisory Board of the Worker's Compensation Committee, is to always do what is both right and fair. I am committed to serving people seeking assistance after they have been injured on the job. I am committed to serving the business owner who is trying to stay in the black. I am committed to serving our State which has to compete with states that have no regard for worker health or safety. And most importantly, I am committed to ensuring that every man and woman who works in Connecticut is protected from financial ruin when tragedy strikes them in the workplace.

I hope that you will give my nomination full consideration and I thank you for the time and opportunity that you have provided me and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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